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RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000291

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W,
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 20 YEARS

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: ONDO PEACEKEEPERS RIOT, DEMAND SALARY

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL DONNA BLAIR FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: On July 4, hundreds of soldiers previously part of the United Nations peacekeeping mission to Liberia rioted over nonpayment of the salary due them for their service. Military officials described the non-payment as an accounting mistake; soldiers say the salaries were being stolen by their superiors, as were those of previous peacekeeping units. One soldier predicts the incident is the beginning of a trend of increasingly violent protests by the military, which only a return to professionalism by military leadership can quell. End Summary.

12. (U) On July 4, hundreds of soldiers who had been part of the United Nations peacekeeping mission deployed to Liberia from September 2007 to April 2008, staged a violent demonstration at the military barracks in Akure, capital of Ondo State, over nonpayment of their salaries. A soldier who took part in the protest told PolSpec that the soldiers blocked major roads in Akure by setting tires on fire in the road. A group also attempted to kidnap the commanding officer but was stopped by guards.

Withheld Salaries Spark Violence...

13. (U) Among their grievances, the soldiers allege that Nigerian military authorities have been withholding their salaries since their return to Nigeria. The soldiers gathered in Akure June 30 when they received notice from the military to collect their pay, the soldier told PolSpec. Despite this summons, no preparations had been made to shelter or feed them, he alleged. No officials arrived to pay them until July 4, the soldier stated; when they did, the soldiers were informed that only half of their salary would be paid. No reason was given. The soldier told PolSpec that the violent reaction was out of anger, and fear that their situation would mirror that of past missions, which were often denied a significant portion of their salaries with no explanation.

...That Soldier Calls "Start of a Trend"

14. (C) The soldier further stated that the soldiers' protest,

which was lauded by their military colleagues in other units, marks the beginning of a trend; soldiers who have suffered years of neglect and abuse, he stated, are set to expose their commanders' wrongdoing.

¶5. (U) Embarrassed by the soldiers' protest, military authorities blamed the reduction in salary on a financial department mistake. According to media reports, Army Spokesman Brigadier-General Emeka Onwuamaegbu said the army is investigating, but would court martial those who protested as well as those who caused the mistake. The House of Representatives Committee on Defense has summoned Defense Minister Yayale Ahmed and Chief of Defense Staff Gen. O.A. Azazi to testify about the protest, media reports stated.

¶6. (SBU) Idowu Salami, an Akure-based lawyer, told PolSpec that the riot shows corruption is destroying a once cohesive institution. The Army, once a disciplined organization with a high degree of professionalism, is now falling apart, he said. He concluded that, as soldiers are regularly shortchanged in salary and benefits, only a reform process to reinstill professionalism in military leadership can help the army.

¶7. (C) Comment: Instances of violence involving the military have in the past involved altercations between the military and the police, including a riot started by fighting between police and soldiers over territorial issues in Lagos in March ¶2008. Independent of the news reporting, we hear that young officers increasingly are challenging their superiors over withheld wages and superiors' abuse of privilege. To our

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knowledge, this is the first time such a challenge has turned violent. That our contact predicts more of the same is disturbing. End Comment.

This cable has been cleared by Embassy Abuja.
BLAIR